

Glendale News Press

Glendale council restricts hookah lounges

Efforts to loosen smoking regulations fall short, fresh air laws already in place.

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Attempts to change city rules for hookah lounges to operate legally in Glendale went up in smoke Tuesday night as the City Council decided to stick with the status quo.

That means businesses that sell hookah — currently there are two that city officials say they are aware of — will be getting notices of violations. If they don't nix their illegal hookah activities, the city can take them to court, which could lead to jail time or fines, said Neighborhood Services Administrator Sam Engel.

The hookah issue pitted smoking opponents against two councilmen that wanted to loosen outdoor smoking regulations, but they failed to reach consensus on the dais.

In 2008, the city passed a fresh air ordinance restricting smoking to 25% of a restaurant's outdoor space, a number city officials acknowledge was arbitrary. Currently, hookah isn't explicitly banned in the zoning code, but businesses that offer it are violating the fresh air law.

On top of that, businesses that serve hookah indoors are violating state indoor smoking prohibitions.

For several months, city committees have been discussing updates to a variety of rules, including those governing hookah use. The Zoning Code Advisory Group was split on permitting hookah, with some members describing it as a cultural activity, and others voicing concerns about the health effects of second-hand smoke.

On Tuesday, dozens of people representing organizations such as the American Heart Assn. and an Armenian club at Herbert Hoover High School, asked the council not to permit hookah lounges.

Resident Marcela Medina, who said she was nine months pregnant, cried at the public speaking podium while describing her fear of second-hand smoke.

"I'm carrying a child and I don't like the idea that she's going into a world where there's hookah smoke around you," Medina said, fighting back tears.

If a business wants to offer hookah in Glendale, they must get a tobacco license from the state and city — a cost of at least \$260 — and limit hookah use to 25% of their outdoor seating area, which must be at least 10 feet away from other seats, or be blocked by a barricade.

The two businesses that currently advertise hookah are the Hookah Lounge at 831 E. Colorado Street and

Phoenicia Restaurant, a Lebanese eatery, at 343 N. Central Avenue.

Hookah Lounge likely won't be able to comply with the fresh air ordinance because it doesn't have enough outdoor space, Engel said. Phoenicia, on the other hand, has a large patio and owner Ara Kalfayan said he'd make it work, even if he wasn't happy about it.

"It's part of their culture," Kalfayan said. "I feel like it's their right."

The owner of Hookah Lounge could not be reached.

But Mayor Laura Friedman said she didn't buy the cultural angle. She likened the situation to a French restaurant, saying that some could argue the French like to smoke, but that doesn't mean Glendale should allow them to break the rules.

Kalfayan said by not permitting hookah use, the city is hurting local business. Burbank allows hookah lounges, but in restricted areas.

"They shouldn't encourage businesses to go out of Glendale," Kalfayan said.